

THEATER in the NOW

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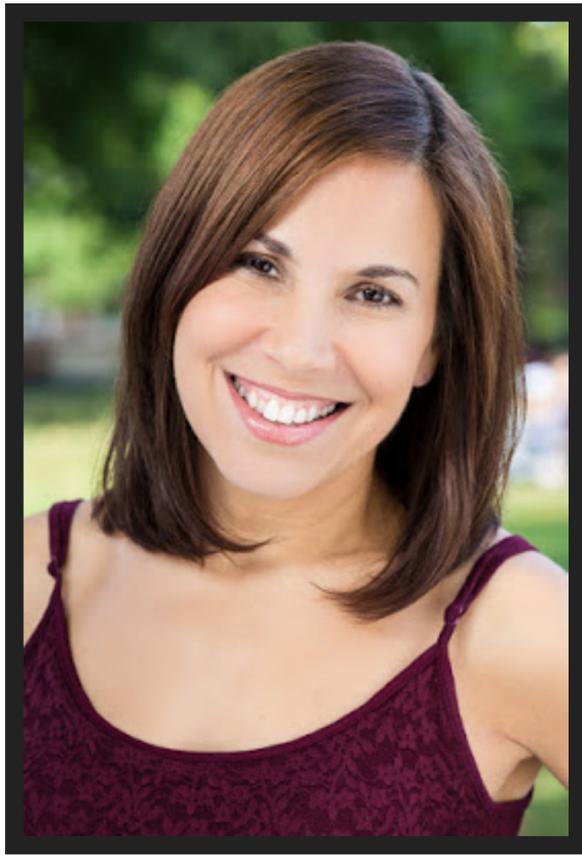
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Wednesday, August 5, 2015

Spotlight On...Dina Laura



Name: Dina Laura

Hometown: Cresskill, NJ is where I spent my childhood years, but I am currently a happy resident of Astoria, Queens!

Education: University of Delaware Honors Program, Bachelor of Science in Accounting/Minor in Political Science

Favorite Credits: Lucy in *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown*, a role I played as a teenager, but still cherish to this day. Rina in *Jacob and Sarah*, an original play written by Charles Drew, a writing mentor of mine. And finally, Angel City Four in *City of Angels*. I had to learn very tight jazz harmonies while simultaneously doing choreography and it was the most challenging role I ever played.

Why theater?: I started as an actor, so writing for theater was just a natural progression. I simultaneously love (and fear) the immediacy of it. There's an energy in the air with live theater that is a total thrill ride. You get an instant reaction from the audience... for better or worse!

Tell us about *Elephants and Other Worldly Dilemmas*: My short and sweet description is: Tornadoes, colonics and faith! A devout receptionist, a superhero scientist, an Apple whore, a devilish bartender and a temp discover that sometimes it takes a dead elephant in the room to show you what you believe in. It's a comedy (if you haven't guessed), but it goes beneath the

surface humor of water cleanses, bowling balls and applanix. The play explores people at odds with their faith - whether it be faith in God, themselves or the world around them - and what happens when they step out of their comfort zones and allow other people's perspectives to affect them. And debuting this play in the NY International Fringe Festival with John Olson and Matt Stapleton is just a dream. The Fringe is like a magical world, and John and Matt are so amazingly talented! All three of us are Meisner trained so we speak the same actor language. And my director, Peter Zachari, is a gem... he has taken my show to places I never imagined. Besides that, he has been involved with the Fringe several times as an actor/director/writer and is a great source of information! And of course the show couldn't run without my fabulous Production Manager, Christine Nicole Gill. She keeps us all in line. Period.

What inspired you to write *Elephants and Other Worldly Dilemmas*?: A conversation I overheard in the waiter station at work. True story. I overheard two servers talking about faith and water cleanses in the same sentence and thought, "There is something to that." And honestly, faith is something I've always wondered about. Why people do what they do (or don't do) in the name of faith, whether on a religious or spiritual level. Exploring such a serious notion in a comedic way as a writer was extremely challenging, but equally rewarding.

What kind of theater speaks to you? What or who inspires you as an artist?: Theater that moves me and makes me think. I want to go home and still be processing what I just saw and experienced. As for who inspires me, there are so many people! But John Patrick Shanley, Oscar Wilde and Woody Allen are who immediately come to mind. John Patrick Shanley's writing blew me away when I saw two fellow actors perform a scene from *Danny and the Deep Blue Sea* in acting class. His language is witty, gritty and heartfelt all at once. And Oscar Wilde's balance of sardonic wit with profound life observations is sheer perfection. I find myself quoting him regularly. And Woody Allen is a master at pointing out our idiosyncrasies as humans in the most wonderfully humorous and touching of ways. "Annie Hall" is one of the greatest films ever written... funny, touching and relatable. And that's ultimately the kind of writer I want to be... someone who puts humor and heart into everything I create.

If you could work with anyone you've yet to work with, who would it be?: Carol Burnett. She can make you laugh and break your heart at the same time. She and Lucille Ball are the greatest comedic actresses of all time, in my opinion. Also, Carol Burnett originated the role of Winnifred in "Once Upon a Mattress," a role I always wanted to play but never got a chance to. "Happily Ever After" was my audition song for years.

What show have you recommended to your friends?: *An American in Paris*. It was one of my dad's favorite movies, so it has sentimental value for me. And I am very happy I got to see it with my mom. The show is visually stunning and the dancing was amazing. As for a play, I recommended *Sex With Strangers* when I saw it last summer. The acting was incredible and being a writer, I found the show thought provoking.

Who would play you in a movie about yourself and what would it be called?: Janeane Garofalo in "If you tell me why, I can let it go."

If you could go back in time and see any play or musical you missed, what would it be?: *Angels in America*. It was a groundbreaking show about a disease that changed our world forever. I have watched numerous actors do scenes from it in my acting studio and I am very regretful that I didn't get to see it. I also would've loved to have seen the original production of *Pippin*. I grew up listening to the soundtrack in the back seat of my parents' car, and I wish I could've seen Ben Vereen's performance live on stage.

What's your biggest guilty pleasure?: Ice cream and Hallmark movies, but I'm not sure I feel guilty about the latter!

If you weren't working in theater, you would be ____?: Teaching! (said enthusiastically) My parents met as teachers and I saw first-hand what a difference my dad made in his students' lives. Good teachers change the world and make it a better place. And as my acting teacher would say, "That ain't nothin'!"

What's up next?: Cleaning my apartment from top to bottom. I've had no time since I was accepted to the Fringe! Other than that, I'd like to revisit a screenplay I wrote "on the rocks," which is based on my first play. It's a story about broken relationships and discovering oneself in the least likely places and with the most unlikely people. And I'd like to act in something I did not write, just for a change of pace :)

For more on *Elephants and Other Worldly Dilemmas*, visit thelephantplay.com

Posted by [Michael Block](#) at 8:47 PM



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